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SIPDIS

Department for SA, SA/INS, G/TIP

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA MAKES CONCERTED EFFORT ON SEVERAL
FRONTS TO COMBAT TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

(U) Classified by Jane Ross, Acting Deputy Chief of
Mission. Reasons: 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: G/TIP Program Officer and Embassy officials met with Government officials and local NGO representatives in Colombo to discuss the multifaceted issue of trafficking in persons in Sri Lanka, including sex tourism, prostitution, and external migrant workers. Officials throughout the GSL highlighted their commitment to addressing this issue and the efforts they were taking to work collaboratively. Hotel managers are part of the dialogue on combating sex tourism, while training courses target migrant workers to raise their awareness before they could be potentially victimized. Much progress has been made, particularly in law enforcement and labor issues, although all interlocutors spoke of the need for further assistance to fight trafficking in persons issues. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) During a June 28 - July 4 visit, Sally Neumann, program analyst in the Department's G/TIP Office, and Embassy officials met with Sri Lankan Government officials and representatives from various NGOs in Colombo. Trafficking in persons, especially in the areas of prostitution, sex tourism and foreign employment migration continues to be a serious concern, but one that is increasingly being addressed by the Government. Much work remains, however. Overall, officials seemed optimistic and enthusiastic about progress in combating these issues, and several training programs and shelters are operating, with more being established. These ongoing efforts were highlighted during visits to the Don Bosco home for trafficked children and a training center run by the Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau, both of which are partially funded by the U.S. Department of Labor through the International Labor Organization.

Sex Tourism

3. (C) Sex Tourism continues to be an issue in Sri Lanka, though the practice seems to be moving into less high-profile locations because of the recent arrests of foreigners, including an American (see more below), and stricter measures taken by hotels, the primary sites of such incidents. Many pedophiles are now escaping more stringent hotel regulations, such as the prohibition of unaccompanied minors on certain hotels' premises, and instead operating from rental homes and guesthouses. This recent pressure from hotels is due in part to restrictions enacted by the Sri Lanka Tourist Board. According to Tourist Board Director General S. Kalaiselvam, association with pedophilia would lead to suspension of a hotel's license, blocking access to a liquor license as well. The Tourist Board is also contemplating other ways to combat sex tourism, such as re-introducing previously successful airport campaigns condemning pedophilia and placing limitations on the hours that hotel bars may serve liquor, as they have found that most pedophiles' initial contact with children occurs between one and two a.m.

4. (C) Officials with the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) have made several arrests of foreigners in recent months, including one American. The sixty-year-old AmCit was apprehended in Kandy on May 1 after a year-long investigation. Professor Harendra de Silva, Chairman of the NCPA, stated that if the man is convicted of engaging in sexual misconduct with a minor, he could get a minimum of ten years imprisonment. Professor De Silva also discussed the July 2001 arrest of an alleged Australian pedophile in Sri Lanka. Instead of a hotel, the Australian had been operating out of one of the laborers' houses on a plantation. Although he was not convicted, Professor De Silva stated that he planned to use the Australian's case in public statements in order to raise awareness about the issue and deter foreigners from engaging in sex tourism in Sri Lanka.

5. (C) The NCPA is also making progress on other fronts by dealing with the potential victims of sex tourism. The organization is currently running a three-year project to develop six centers around the country that will educate

children on HIV, drugs & alcohol, and child abuse. The centers will be located in areas where the likelihood of child trafficking is high, such as around army camps, in key tourist areas such as beach resorts, and other regions where large numbers of street kids reside.

Prostitution

16. (C) Though significant strides have been taken by Sri Lankan officials to combat the issue, prostitution continues to be a social concern with the trafficking of women from both inside and outside Sri Lanka. Sarath Lugoda, Director of the Sri Lanka Police Colombo Crime Division, expressed confidence in recent crackdowns on prostitution, however, asserting that the effects of improved policing can be seen through the recent trends toward "mobile brothels," prostitution rings run from rented vehicles which are frequently changed. These "mobile brothels" are harder to shut down, but their increased usage represents a move away from more "traditional" brothels, as many of those have been raided and closed. In the past, most of these prostitution rings were run as licensed health clubs or in rental homes where the landlords would be paid higher rents to keep silent.

17. (C) Lugoda also expressed concern over the plight of the women involved, as many get drawn in unwittingly. A lot of the women are young, uneducated, from broken families, and respond to misleading advertisements in the newspapers for jobs at "karaoke clubs." Once they are coerced into prostitution, however, they are trapped and denied any outside contact. Trafficking of women from China, Russia, and Thailand is also a considerable setback in keeping prostitution under control. Many of these foreign women obtain a three-month visa to Sri Lanka and intend to continue on to Singapore after this period. If they are caught and tried, however, the prostitution managers that employ them instruct them to plead not guilty so that they will be released on bail. As their passports are usually not impounded during this process, they are then able to flee the country as soon as they are released. About 90 percent of apprehended foreign prostitutes follow this practice, making it unfeasible for authorities to identify them or get them into any treatment or counseling centers.

18. (C) Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Sarath Jayasundara, the Officer-In-Charge of the Police Women and Children's Bureau, nevertheless appeared optimistic in regards to recent efforts to combat prostitution and stated an increase in civilian awareness and reporting. The main downside to this improved reporting is information overload. Reports are received every day from 347 police stations and, without funding for a database, it is increasingly difficult to keep track of information. Jayasundara reported that in 2003 alone there were 1,748 cases of child prostitution and abuse, most of which involved Sri Lankan citizens.

External Migrant Workers

19. (C) Women who migrate legally and illegally to areas such as the Middle East, often to be domestics, are also at high risk for trafficking. SSP Sumaratunga of the Sri Lanka Criminal Investigation Department reported that those who do so illegally usually leave the country in three ways: they obtain a legal passport through forged documents, they travel to Singapore or Thailand and then proceed illegally from there, or they depart on unseaworthy vessels that are designed to transport fish. Most migrants, both legal and illegal, are unaware of the perils they face and once they reach their destination countries, may not be in a position to control their situation if it becomes intolerant or dangerous. Yet even if these women have heard stories of situations that have gone wrong, they continue to be attracted abroad in order to receive better pay, escape domestic problems, and avoid the social stigma of working as a "servant" in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, according to statistics kept by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), less than one percent of migrant workers in the Middle East actually end up in a trafficked situation.

110. (C) To help prevent migrant workers from getting into dangerous situations, the Bureau of Foreign Employment has attempted to impose proactive regulations. Karunasena Hettiarachchi, Chairman of the Bureau, stated that an internet hotline has been established for the women, as internet cafes abroad are often the most accessible modes of communication, given restrictions imposed by employers on outside contact. The Bureau has also started a system of complaint gathering with consequences including blacklisting of the agencies and workers implicated in both Sri Lanka and the destination countries and/or a suspension

of a particular agency's license. To date, 40 foreign agencies and 18 domestic agencies have been blacklisted and 15 agencies have been suspended by the Bureau. The Bureau also offers monetary compensation for the repatriation of the trafficking victims involved. Hettiarachchi also commented on reports claiming that Sri Lankan Government officials were involved in trafficking incidents in the Middle East. He stated that there had been a few incidents of Sri Lanka Embassy-operated safe houses in Kuwait being used as brothels and that these cases were currently under investigation.

11. (C) In addition to their other efforts, the SLBFE has set up 31 training centers around the country with 125 female instructors to educate prospective migrant workers about how to manage and what to expect in their new environments. During a visit to one site, Embassy officials learned that the Bureau provides a total of four courses, one of which is a refresher course for returning migrant workers, two of which are destination-specific (Middle East versus non-Middle East), and a basic English literacy course, as literacy is a pre-requisite for the other three. In these courses, women are trained on handling emergencies, financial management, family arrangements, HIV/AIDS, personal hygiene, visa procedures, usage of electrical equipment, and other necessary basic information. All legal migrants are required to complete this free training before they leave the country, and although the Bureau has not sought any official feedback, they have observed that the number of problems reported after the training was made compulsory has significantly declined.

Comment

12. (C) Sri Lanka is pointedly making an effort to address the issues of trafficking in the country. Notably, many different government sectors -- law enforcement, labor and employment -- seem to be engaged in these issues. However, there are still problems that remain, for example, in the need to further develop rehabilitation options for victims. Mission looks forward to continuing this dialogue with government officials and identifying areas where USG resources can provide aid.

13. (U) Ms. Neumann did not clear on this cable before leaving Sri Lanka.

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